



## Opinion

### Test cheats: The Senate crosses a line on graduation exams

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The state Senate went too far this week in trying to take jurisdiction over statewide high school graduation requirements.

The move came on a 48-2 vote on Senate Bill 1442, an attempt to derail a proposal that would require Pennsylvania students to pass graduation competency exams in order to get their diplomas. The bill is not complicated. Just 20 lines long, it would change the state school code so that any statewide requirements for high school graduation that are not already on the books could be established only by the General Assembly.

This action steps across the line from the state's legislative to its executive branch. And it's a slap in the face of the state Education Department and its board.

In 2006, the Governor's Commission on College Career and Success unanimously endorsed the use of graduation exams to help ensure students leave high school prepared for college or careers. The State Board of Education has held six public meetings -- albeit where a wealth of opposition was expressed -- and now has proposed requirements that will affect high school seniors in 2014.

The Education Department has done its homework on this subject, avoiding the kind of single, winner-take-all tests that are used in some of the 22 states that already have such provisions for graduation.

Pennsylvania's proposal would bring some consistency to diplomas from the state's 501 public school districts while maintaining flexibility. Students could demonstrate proficiency by passing either six of the 10 statewide tests to be developed by the Education Department, the Pennsylvania System of Statewide Assessment exams already being administered, an Advancement Placement or International Baccalaureate test on a topic, or a local district exam as long as it is certified to be equivalent to state tests.

The normal procedure would be for the state House and Senate education committees to take up-or-down votes that reflect only a recommendation on the graduation requirements to the state's Independent Regulatory Review Commission.

Instead, senators -- armed with opposition to the tests from 130 school boards, teachers unions and some other statewide organizations -- decided to try to kill the graduation plan in

the Legislature. That's cheating, not something the state should be teaching its students.

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